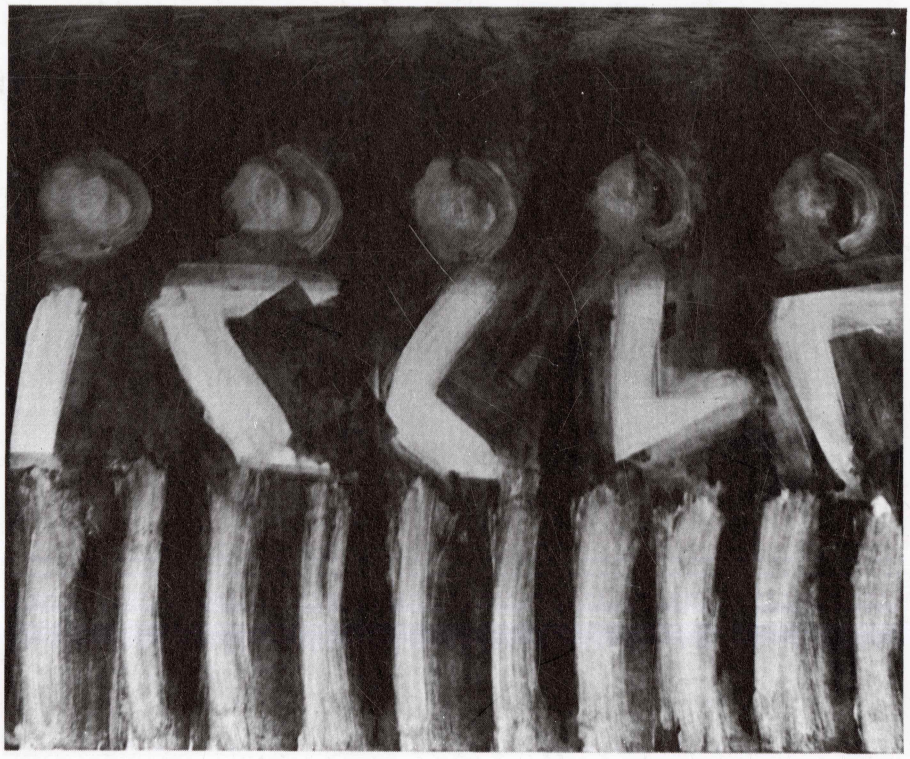
TOWER



SPRING 1987

THE TOWER

Literary/arts magazine, University of Montevallo, Spring, 1987

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Dr. Charles Majure, literature
Ms. Sarah Palmer, literature
Mr. Scott Stephens, art

This issue of *THE TOWER* is dedicated to Scott Stephens for his tireless efforts in soliciting artwork and his diligence in seeing this project through.

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The Miller James Cormier

Ellen Ryan

Blue Night

Blue rhythms blown from saxes
circling, saddening the senses.

Hot high heels on bold legs
strutting rhythms, seeking glances.

Figures spinning, dipping,
finger-popping through the spaces.
Bodies touching moving
never looking into faces.

Neon eased through wet hot air
Melting on the bodies in slow motion
Low motion.....no motion
Figures shifting.....slowing
Skin glistening with reflected light
A storm was brewing out of sight
A subtle move, a passion checked
Matches flicked
Muscles flexed
Smoke spread through the heavy air
Obscuring gestures hidden there
In this sluggish heat glazed scene
An eyebrow arched
An earring flashed
The elements mixed.....passions clashed

Danny Gamble

Presidential Drag

The bear shits
in the woods
We use plumbing

The poor self-perpetuate
The rich transmigrate

Load up, boys
Sixty commies
lie sunning
on Caribbean beachheads

The sun never sets
on Santa Barbara

No, I never won an Oscar
but, then again,
I never played a part this well

Don't you love the way
the Iowa's firing
sixteen-inchers glow orange
like a Mediterranean sunset

The middle melts
and flows
like hot wax
down the face
of our nation

When I was a cowboy
guns fired blanks
and the dead always walked
away living

Surplus cheese
feeds every
starving child

Imaginary hunger
bleeds cash reserves
costing taxpayers
valuable warheads

Peace,
the final frontier,
but too costly to explore

There is no nation
past the doors
of this oval office

Cry wolf
He's knocking
at your door.

Wendy Hubbard

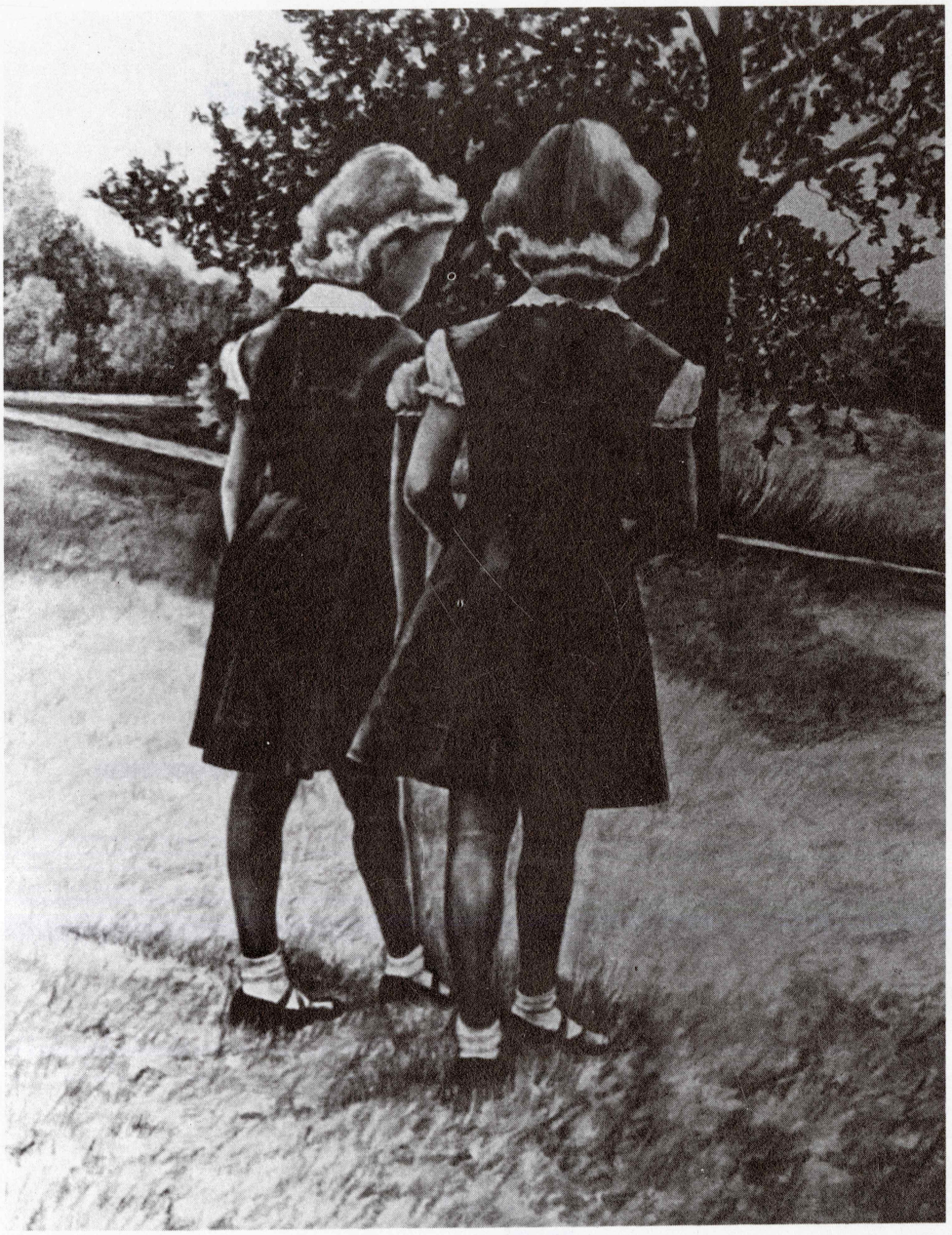
Faces

Fake paper faces
searching through endless
layers of cement.
Seeing only visions of nothing.
Looking at wordless paper
trying to make sense out of life.

On Childhood

Then-
a carefree spirit
embodied me
like
sneaking cookies from a jar
digging to China
(or to the devil's house)
and building tents
under the dining room table.
secure
in imagination
and living
and wondering
and accepting.
It was
"o.k."
to be irrational
or naughty
or curious.
A fanciful utopia,
inevitably surrendered to time.

Now-
with spirits chained
by invisible presences
I cannot live
in destroying
reality.
Unable to echo
a perverse need,
limitations end
a sincere desire
in which
the elimination
of pain
cannot be fathomed
by me
or you
but only by the little child
who still lives in me,
So-
I will sneak cookies
dig to China
and live in my
tent
under the dining room table.



Best Friends Delle Geeslin

Derek L. Williams

Stanzas for Mammon

lying on my
emotional
condition she
realizes
cosmic injustice
censorship
of rainbows
all
the while
dancing
on the
mayflies

Wallflower

Just glide through
maybe we'll
dance
is that her
the one with
velvet
tears which fall
down her amber
cheek
smile for once
like a rainbow
please
yeah, she's neat
just like a
lavalamp.

Dan Tabb

South African Funeral

Lines
running down the walk
across the street
leading to the yard,
Lines of black--
dappled with white.

Lines driving in trucks
down the street
Leading to the yard.
Lines of blue---
scattered with stars.

Lines of black,
lines of blue,
suddenly perpendicular.

No more lines of black--
only a plane of red--
spotted with blue.

Kendra Jones

The Fallacy of the Old Grow Gracefully

Pain and suffering
is a lonely place
for the fully conscious
who know all-too-clearly
where they've been
and where they now are.
They dwell in a place
where pain and suffering
is carried on aching hunched backs
and liver-splotched faces,
where the dining room smells
of urine and Ben Gay
and the orderly shakes crumbs
off of polyester dresses.
It is most difficult
for the fully conscious
who watch with wounded animal eyes
their hair falling out on the dinner table,
who must bear the weight
of embarrassment, who
cannot move without the care
of a goddamn wheelchair,
pushed by a cute blond nurse
who would rather be with her boyfriend
than there, there
where the fully conscious realize
their loved ones are too weak to bear it,
loved one who must be aware
that they have placed
the fully conscious there
but keep sending checks to insure
that the old folks live
in a constant reminder of death.
The loved ones do not care to share
in the grief that seems pasted
on the ancient life-bruised faces.

The fully conscious suffer the most
each morning when they wake up
to four square green walls
with no pictures,
to that young blond nurse
who shaves and bathes them,
their groins stroked clean
for the sake of hygiene,
sagging breasts pressed
in a routine search for that fatal black mass,
and that cute young blond nurse
would rather be with her boyfriend.
The old people never make love.
The senile, those whose minds died first,
don't notice.
But that fire slowly burns
in the withered groins
of the fully conscious
who are past dreaming of it,
who now ache for the place
where love,
like fresh dew greeting bare bottoms
on the first warm day,
is made,
and the sound of human flesh against flesh whispers
come children play.

Jonathan Wood

Smoking in Waiting

Smoking in Waiting,
Sitting at the door
or Standing at the window,
Waiting for you to arrive.
Smoke curls up and out and all around.
Light another.
You called, I smiled, and we said goodbye.
Now I'm Smoking in Waiting.

Smoking in Anticipation,
Dreaming of a warm touch
or Thinking about a friendly kiss,
Anticipating a car door, or
a knock on the door, your feet on the floor.
Smoky "Os" surge forth and dissolve,
Fading into a cloud.
Light another.

Smoking in Patience,
Trying not to pace so much,
Trying to keep my head,
Patiently waiting, counting the stars,
Standing on the lawn or sitting on the porch.
Smoke goes nowhere in the night air.
Dial, ring, again, patient, eyes closed.
Light another.

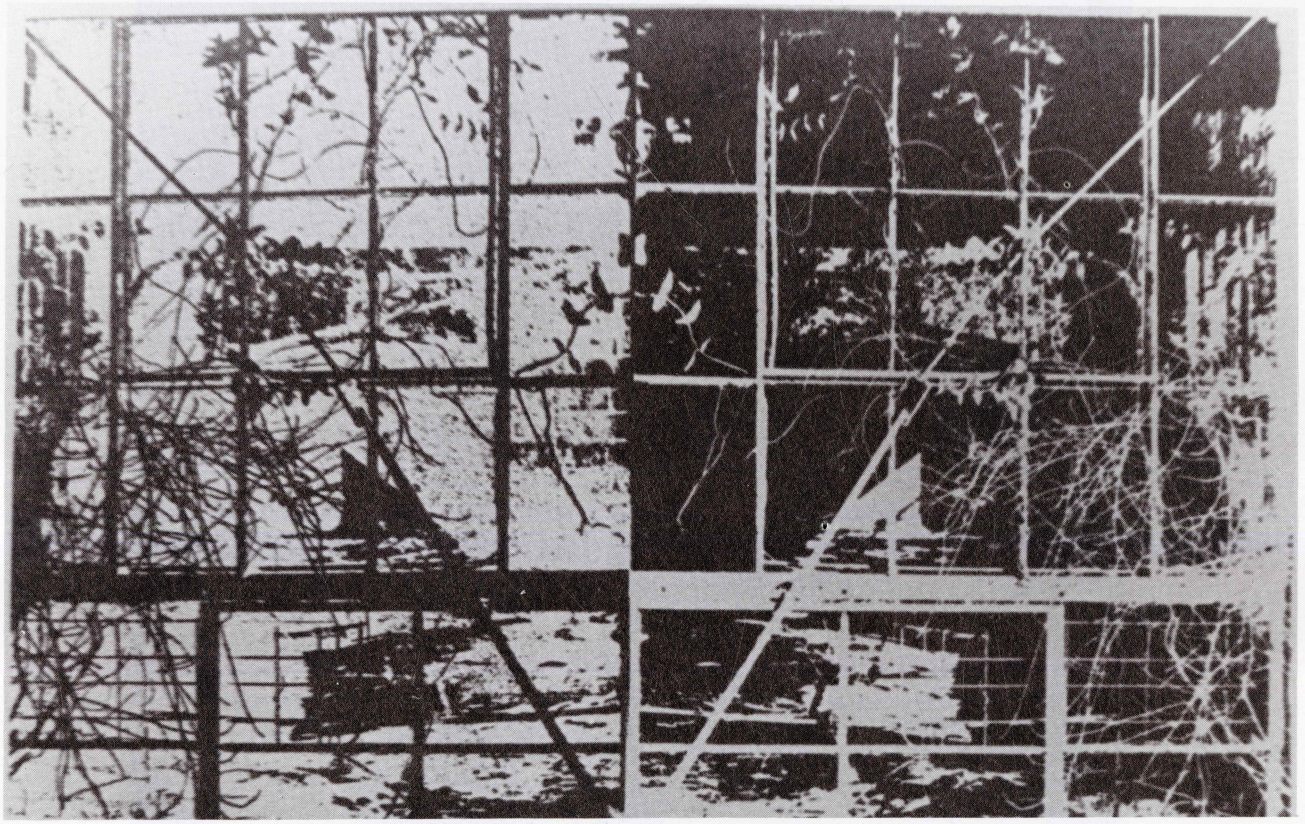
Smoking in Anxiety,
Keeping my cool and watching the clock.
The second hand never moved so slow,
and the other hands, never so fast.
And my hand never trembles so,
Until I started Smoking in Anxiety.
You told me you loved me and said goodbye,
and I dared not cry.

Smoking in Silence,
My heart is heavy, my eyelids, the same.
I am worn
and torn between promise and reality.
Despair's heavy hand has wrapped its stony fingers
around my velvet heart
And it squeezes

And it hurts

As I Smoke

in Silence.



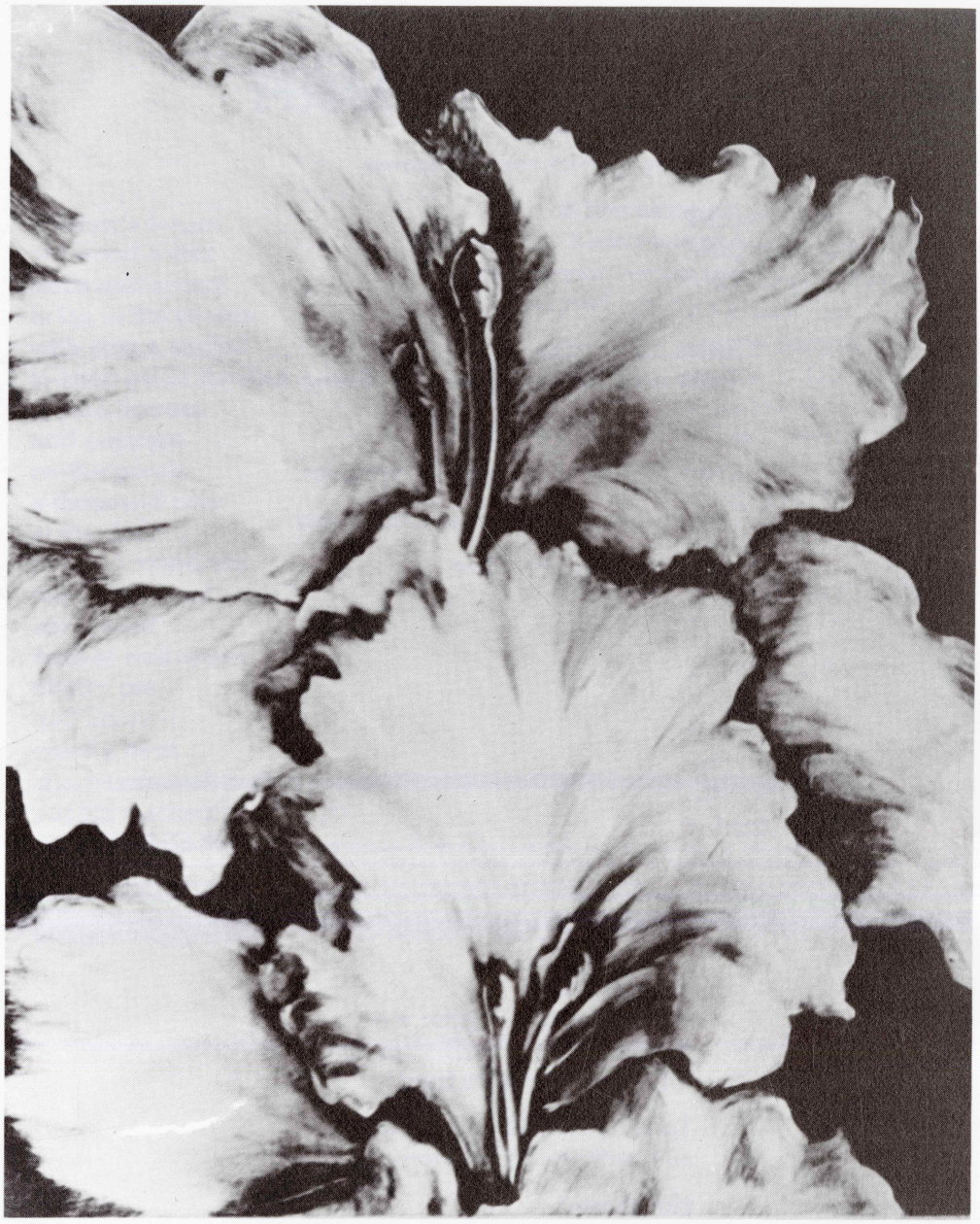
Revised Screen #1 Stuart Siniard

Paula Reynolds

Lost Sanity

inadequate hopes and unknown thoughts
crowd at memory's door
just sold my soul for
a nickle and a prayer
and really don't know what for.

ages past and dreams forgotten
pull us through insanity
knock, knock.
who's there?
the devil's only pet
wishing for a dollar
and searching everywhere.



Petals

Annette K. Moates

Mementos of a Girl

Heartbreaker
Like you, I go by several names.

He screamed at
her and called
her names...unpleasant
things can happen

Rules, rules, rules.
Tasks must be completed first. Wrong.

I wonder where my head was?

There is nothing here worth dying for.

Some things just don't need changing.

Think about yourself first.

Yes we did!
God-damn, the pusher man--
4-wheelin' in West Blocton on
a Friday -- we were fried.

To-kill-ya -- you know, that
stuff with the agave worm.

Hot shoes.
Hot work,
Hot day.

You see, I don't stand for that shit.
Knee's house -- FULL
60s music & all.
It's so H-O-T.
I love it so much.

Cynthia McGinnis

Poem for my Mother

Granny's house
old wood-rotten
steps and swing
holes in the screen
with cotton stuffed
to keep away the flies
drying flowers
and peppers
on the porch
a thousand cats
at the door
smell of mothballs
old papers and
cornbread
taste of well-water
cherry pie
and licorice
creaky beds
and hand-made quilts
papers stacked from 1926
unopened packages
from the same year
attic
hidden treasures

flapper skirts
election buttons
white cotton gowns
coon-skin cap
pigeon perched on a rafter
violets by the creek
dogs follow
to see if faeries
left a mushroom ring
using a broken compass
an eight-year-old detective
listening
lying on a feather bed
to Granny's stories.

But time withers imagination
and memories aren't
that clear
I have to stop in
silence if I ever want
to hear

Chicken frying in
Granny's kitchen.

Sigmund Freud Discovers Passion

They are talking of splitting the deoxyribonucleic acid molecule
when suddenly he looks into her eyes --
normally grey eyes that probably hide some repressed guilt
    from a subconscious childhood memory.
She too sees something in his eyes --
simple blue eyes, of course, he probably has a need
    to control her -- an outstretch of his deep maternal attachments.
With her finger she traces the veins that pulse in long
    blue branches in his hand.
He takes her hand and kisses it.
Then she touches his hair and holds his jaw.
For a few minutes they remain at the couch
until it becomes too small to hold their lust.

So they collapse onto the floor,
practically relieved from the strain.
Now their movements are so swift
that they cannot be calculated.
It now looks as if he is devouring her fragile frame.
She even seems to be struggling
but not hard enough

to release herself.

An aura of heat surrounds them
and they revel in it,
unwilling to end the lavishness of their tight clenches.
    Then, rather suddenly,
    the intensity rises
    and for a time
    remains there.
                But then it falls again.
And the lovers lie like
gladiators after a battle.

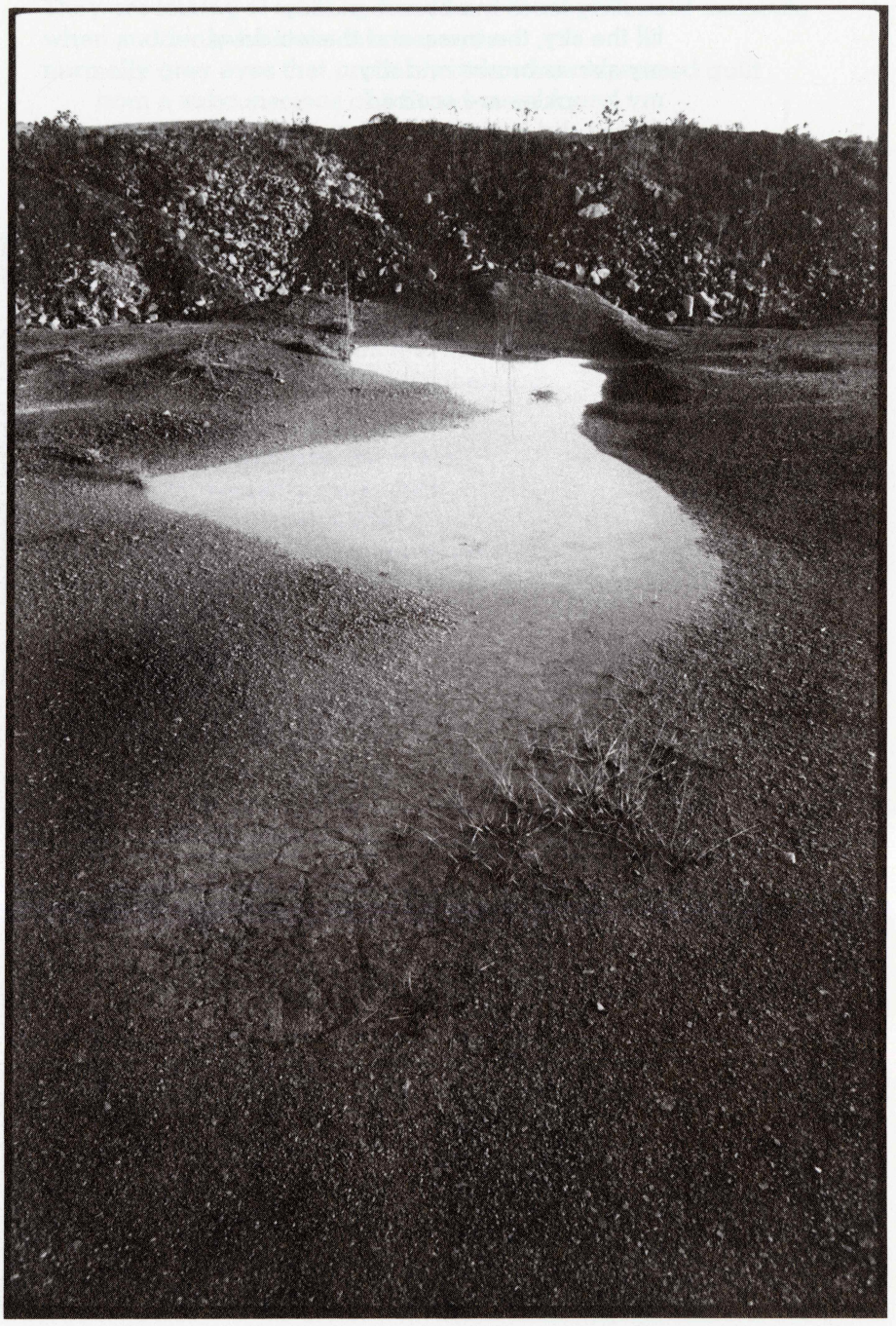
They rise, she goes to the kitchen
for a gulp of brandy,
and he rather rushes to the bedroom.

When he returns and when they again are clothed
and the climate is cooler,

they talk of more important things
like atom bombs
and splitting genes.

Alive

smiling faces in obscure places
fill the sky, the trees, and the windows
my skin is brown and dry
my knuckles are scarred
there's dirt between my fingers
and under my fingernails
when I die they'll see it
and say this girl lived.
If I'm lucky and don't die in water.



Lee Dunnie

Lee Dunnie

Sunday Morning

She stands at the stove,
preparing the usual Sunday morning breakfast,
Remembering the consummation of whispered plans,
the sizzling bacon an echo.
The husband enters, discusses the weather, the children,
the ball scores,

while she notices that an early fall has stripped the
trees bare...
And hopes for an early Spring.

Notes to my Heart

I feel his music
and yet I am missing a chord.
His pitch a soft, gentle, and tender
for those who listen.

His soul is the soul of past musicians--
all singing out of tune
and yet,
there is harmony.

I want the chord that no other ear has heard.
He sits at the piano and pretends
to play for me--
to sing to me.

Instead he hides his notes
in the horizons of his musical scale.

Kirk Hardesty

Hero

Great Grandpa is great.
He was a hero in the War,
He helped us win,
    and he has medals to show--
But he keeps them put away,
    I've seen them only once.

His warm, wrinkled brown eyes
Would smile at me
As he told grand stories
Of Princesses and Dragons;
The brave Knight Hero,
    with lance upon horse--
Would always make the dragon
    give up the girl;
They'd ride away as I fell to dreams.

But I don't understand
Why any Hero would not wear his medals,
And why one day, when I asked him
    to tell of the fighting,
He just looked at me with his wrinkled brown eyes,
    and cried.

K. Denise McGriff

Altar Call

Daily -- they rush to give their all to the giant.
From Mercedes to Ford these metal boxes carry the massive congregation
to concrete cathedrals.
Overpass archways and skyscraper steeples decorate the temple.
Hymns of horns and curses, typewriters singing praises,
And Quarter Pounder communion reminds them of time's sacrifice
"More intelligence," says Progress,
But loss of purpose is its price.
And Money is all that really matters
As the Modern Day Pagans worship their material world.

Paulette Dickerson

Chair

His chair sits empty.
The saturday
evening paper
laid across it
the way he always
left it
until last night
when i finally
threw it
away.
Should've kept it.
One last souvenir
of one last irritation.

I'd loved him once
surely i had.
Or thought as much
and he'd loved me.
Once.
Maybe he still does -- did.
My present and
past tenses
have become confused.

I looked in the mirror
on my way out the door,
preparing
my face
for sorrow.
A few expected tears,
a blank expression --
what else could they
want?

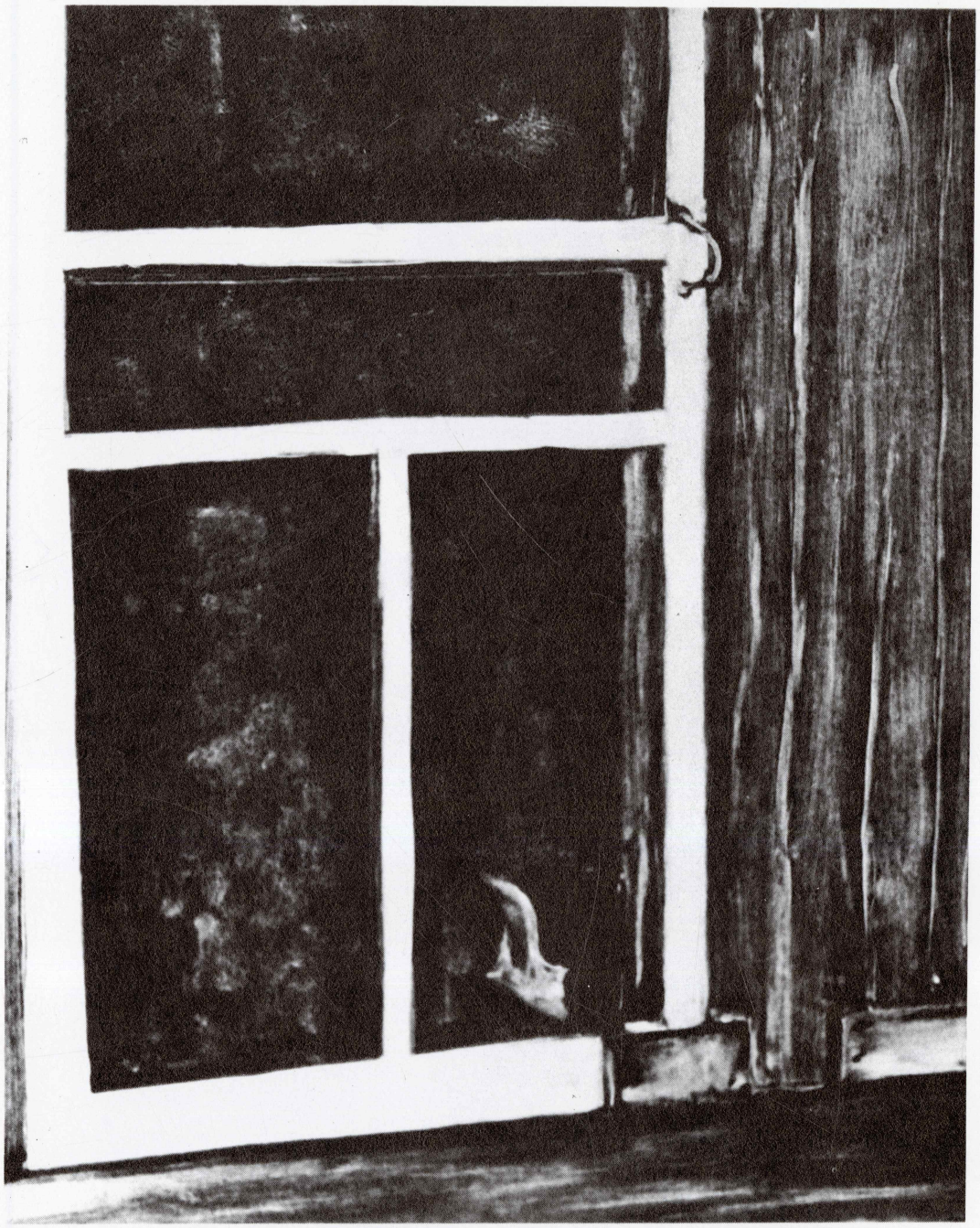
Oh, that chair.
His damn empty chair.
I'll give it to one
of them --
one of them.

I'm not a part of a them
or a they
or an us
or a we anymore,
am I?
I, me, my, myself, mine.
No.
My (empty) chair

Jerri Buckingham

Miratu

Drift on into Bangkok,
Soothing voice
Of river's flow
Rushing forward,
Open-armed,
With depths of mystery.
Rhythmic contemplation
Gives vent to soulful awakening --
A tumult of emotion.
Seize the flood
And tame the steed,
Flying faster than limitations themselves.
Immersed in golden
Tones of artistry,
Weaving in hearts and souls,
Gently stirring
The longing to drift
To Bangkok.



Delle Geeslin

Donna Lois Carter

Iconoclast

Within the sacred temples
gazing at the shattered mirror
the onlookers cried
for they saw
themselves
as they were
in their
souls

And
I
laughed

For it was I who,
out of contempt,
destroyed the mirror

In order to reveal
to them
who laughed at me
but did not know
what I knew
That the only
difference between
me
and
them
was a size 9
flatheel
shoe

Kazuo Page Moriya

Paul Schattel

Dog in a Brown Paper Bag

Bizarre imagery vignette
Maybe religion or something
Not too sappy
But oozing feeling

References to Love and/or Rock and Roll
And cats; lots of cats

Maybe "Your eyes are like pools of..."
or maybe "Suicide-like figures writhe in the empty dust"

No

More bizarre imagery
Doves or something
Peace and all that
and call it something
Interesting Ambiguous
Maybe
Dog in a brown paper bag

I love my mother

Teri E. Wilbanks

Talk to Me

A word is spoken...exposed
to the piercing eye unseen
the one that roves between
lines of sounds unheard
and so the idea is uttered
made concrete
through confession,
or a facial expression
or with jesters of legs and hands
that tell lies from lips of tension
while keeping a smile of inconsistancies...

The noise becomes so loud
that I can hardly tell
if you'll ever really listen
to the message I need
for you to hear.

Yet my hand touches your arm
to exemplify the point
but you jerk away
you'd rather not be touched
So the smiles fade
and you...so polite...
will make another attempt to listen,
but so only to change the subject
to something a bit more relevant
And so we take turns
in communicating...

Newness of Life

Stacks and stacks of unfinished portraits,
    lined and waiting the Master's touch
    to check their theme
    their flow of strokes
are decorating a blank wall.

Some of the canvas has already aged;
their colors have started to fade.
Some are loud clammers...
    crashed into a distant hue
that will hold one's attention
only for a moment or two...
So many are just blank
propped against the wall...
    one complete unfinished thought.

This one started last October
    No...no...November
        -----December???
It's cold nonetheless...
That one ----- there,
    a favorite of mine,
is the one closest completion
....the heart circumcised....the spirit burns....
I think I'll call it newness of Life.

James M. Shepherd

Craig Stroud

Justice?

To write, no, to sing a thousands words,
Lisped upon a silken page.
To linger upon a dying breath
Cheated by the wholesome liar.
Penetrating upon a broken soul,
Brightened by the song of shame.

Fading breath warms my cheek
As spit drips upon an ivory floor.
chase the villian to his hole,
And beg the devil for his soul.
Shall wheat be bread,
and wine be meat?
A dying man divorces his wife
and tumbling rebels squeeze their minds.

Karen D. Marks

He was such a simple looking child:
A shock of dirty blond hair cascading over
A pair of slightly brown eyes,
Ruddy cheeks smudged with the day's activities...
so full of life...

He hath no form nor
comeliness; and when
we shall see Him there
is no beauty that
we should desire Him

Grubby hands picking the neighbor's flowers,
A can of fishing worms left over from last
Saturday in the refrigerator,
His room adorned with only the Best arrowheads,
The Smoothest stones, the Most Disgusting snake skins--
all that comes along with young boys.

for He shall grow up
before him as a tender
plant, and as a root
out of dry ground.

Often, Will's mother received notes from his teacher,
Complaining that he had been in yet another fight.
He was only taking up for Nathan-- a young
Boy who had been left severly retarded by a
Fever he had when he was just a baby.

and the Child...waxed
strong in the spirit

He grew to be a right good size,
Still rather boyish-looking, though.
Lean and rugged, he towered over most of his peers.
That unruly blond hair always managed to stay in his eyes, though--
seemed to have a mind of its own.
At the age of 21, he became a crater at the
local cannery.

He increased in
wisdom and stature

This young man's life of promise was abruptly
Ended one sultry August night, when a
Gunshot rang out from down at the cannery.
the noise awakened the slumbering town.
Peaceful rest would now begin to evade them
And would continue to do so for a while to come.
Sheriff Wilson was the first one on the scene.
Will was standing in the middle of the room
Fighting back tears.
His best friend lay
Dead beside him.
The Gun
Was at Will's feet.
They had worked late...too late.
Asking no questions, just slinging railing accusations,
The sheriff took Will towards the jailhouse.
No one heard the frantic scrambling in the woods.
Nathan had only been showing them
the Gun
He had found by the creek that day.
Will went along quietly.

the Lord hath laid
upon Him the iniquity
of us all...and as
a sheep before his
shears is dumb,
so He openeth not
His mouth

A group of vigilantes stormed the one-celled
Jailhouse about three that morning.
Sheriff Wilson did nothing to stop them...
called it justice.
The shouts were suddenly silenced by another shot.
Those brown eyes were forever stilled,
Frozen in place under a
Shock of blood soaked hair.

He was taken from
prison and from judgement...He
was cut off from the
land of the living

The stillness that followed was
Suddenly broken
When Nathan came screaming
Out of the woods:
"I'm Sorry!"
"I didn't mean to! It was an accident!"
"I won't play with it no more!"
"please don't hurt me."
In horror, the people looked at Will's limp body.
A silent scream went up as they realized
The tragedy that had just taken place.
Too late to do anything now, though.
The LAW said a life for a life
the Price had been Paid.

He shall see the suffering
of His soul and shall
be satisfied...He said
"It is finished"

The following Thursday afternoon,
Will's body was laid to rest.
Preacher Anderson eulogized him as a
Quiet, humble man, who,
In his most desperate act of compassion
Lost his life.
the burial site was just over the hill
Past Corn Creek.
All of Bethel showed up for his funeral.
Nathan wept unashamedly...
so did everyone else.

they shall look upon
Him Whom they have
pierced, and they shall
mourn for Him as
one who mourneth for
his only son...and one
shall say unto Him, "what
are these wounds in thine
hands?" then shall He
answer,"those with which
I was wounded in the
house of My friends."
He was wounded for our
transgressions, He was
bruised for our iniquities:
the chastisement for
our peace was upon Him...

Nancy Jenkins

The Train Ride

Eight year old Martha sat on the weather beaten fence at the end of the dusty driveway, waiting for her father to come home from work. It was a hot August afternoon. The drone of insects was slow in the air. Mousy brown hair hung around her face as she watched a beetle trying to carry its valuables into the tall grass behind the fence. Martha looked up the road again as she chewed on her thumbnail, feeling an anxious tug at the bottom of her stomach. There wasn't any sign of a dusty trail from her father's truck.

Martha's back stiffened suddenly as she heard in the distance, a muted train whistle. She sighed, cupped her hand under her chin, and rested her elbow on her thigh. She loved the sound of that whistle. She thought of the many miles the train would take her. It would adventurously chug and whistle down paths that are unknown and wind through exotic lands that are waiting for her like Paris and Chicago. That was the reason Martha was sitting in the late afternoon sun. She was going to come straight out and ask her father if she could ride the train from the nearby stop at Kettle River to Moose Lake, the closest town for miles. It was a flawless plan because her pa worked in Moose Lake at the garage, and he could easily pick her up. She knew that they had hardly any money, but she had saved a nickle and knew that would really help pay for the ticket. She would just have to find the courage to ask or just wither up and die.

Pa is late, she thought and looked up the road again. Just then she saw a cloud of dust rise up over the hill. Her stomach jumped to her throat. She just had to ask him. Her anxiousness turned to puzzlement and surprise when she saw Mr. Johnson driving her father's truck. He stopped by Martha, a billow of dirt setting around the old truck.

"Climb in and I'll give you a ride up to the house," he said. He averted his eyes and stared at the steering wheel. His voice sounded funny.

Martha hopped down from the fence and straightened the thin cotton dress that hung limply on her small frame. She kicked the dust off her shoes. She looked questioningly at his face. Mr. Johnson smiled at her, his blue eyes lined with suntanned wrinkles. She got in and the old truck grinded its way up the driveway. Mr. Johnson parked the truck by the barn. Martha thought it seemed happy there.

Martha quickly got out and bounded to the house, thin brown hair flying out behind her and gangly legs everywhere. The back porch screen door slammed behind her. Her mother looked at her with a permanent scowl that never seemed to leave her face.

"Sorry," Martha said timidly. "Mr. Johnson's here and he is driving the truck!"

Mr. Johnson's form was silhouetted against the screen door. Martha's mother went to the door. She didn't want to open it. She saw the watery eyes and the shifting feet.

'What happened?" she asked, afraid of the answer.

"Can I come in Mrs. Larson?"

She nodded slowly and opened the screen door. Mr. Johnson heistated for a second and then walked in. Martha's mother looked at her and her sister, Patsy, who was standing by the table.

"You two go get your brothers from the field. Now!"

Patsy, who was two years older than Martha, grabbed her arm and yanked her toward the door. Martha started down the steps and toward the back pasture when she noticed that Patsy was standing by the door, her back pressed up against the house. Martha quietly tiptoed beside Patsy and tried to listen. She felt like an intruder coming upon an obscene act.

"They took him to the funeral parlor in town Mrs. Larson," Mr. Johnson said in a low voice. "All I know is that he asphyxiated himself, ah...I mean was asphyxiated by working on a car in the garage."

"Don't you dare repeat or even think that he could have...have...done that to himself!" Martha's mother's voice shook.

"Well...I'll help you out all I can, you know, with the funeral arrangements."

"Yes. Yes," she said without listening.

Martha and Patsy ran away from the house as fast as they could go. The air in Martha's lungs came in short, hard gasps. Suddenly, she felt a sharp pain in her side. She slowed down to a walk as Patsy kept running and running. Could her father be dead? She felt very numb inside. And what did asphyxiate mean anyway? She didn't understand. Martha began to walk back to the house, trying to work out the knot in her side. Fear crept up from the base of her spine, but she didn't know why, where it was coming from, or how to get rid of it. Her three brothers and Patsy ran by her toward the house. She started to run, holding her side, grimacing.

When Martha got to the house everyone was in the kitchen. Her baby sister sat banging a wooden spoon on the table, oblivious to anything going on around her. Her mother sat dry eyed at the table. Her voice came out dry and lifeless.

"Your pa is dead. We'll have to bury him in a couple of days I suppose. It was an accident, do you hear? Nothing but an accident. We'll have to bury him in a couple of days."

Martha walked as if she were in a trance to her room. She lay on the bed, her mind not thinking of anything. It just felt blank. No one came to get her for supper, not that she minded that much. She turned on her side wondering if there was any supper tonight.

The next morning when she got up from bed, the room was lit in a predawn haze. She was still wearing the clothes from yesterday. She went downstairs into the kitchen. Time had seemed to stop. Everything was like it was last night. Her mother was still sitting at the table.

"Mr. Johnson said they were going to put your pa on the train today. I wonder who will pick him up?" Her mother's voice trailed off into silence.

Martha didn't know who would pick him up. She didn't know anything.

"Ma, what does asphyxiated mean?" she asked.

Her mother's eyes snapped with rage. "It was an accident do you hear!" she screamed.

Martha's bottom lip quivered as she turned and ran out the door. She stopped by the truck and pressed her face against the cool glass. Her chest heaved with sobs, and tears dripped from her chin. She only wanted to know what was going on. All she wanted to know was what to do. Martha felt ashamed. She wasn't crying for her father; she was crying for herself.

That afternoon, Martha, her mother, and her oldest brother, Bill, climbed into the truck and headed for Kettle River. Martha watched the narrow road ahead as the truck went up and down gently rolling hills. Her mother's body was ridged, her lips moving in a singsong motion, but no sound came out. Bill wiped sweat and tears off of his face every now and then and gripped the sterring wheel desperately.

They reached the Kettle River train station, if you could call a one room shack a train station. They were all choked with dust.

"Bill, get us a grape pop would you?" her mother asked. She seemed to have come back to her senses as she handed him a nickel.

Martha and Bill looked at each other for a moment. He walked off toward the cooler sitting by the door of the shack. Two people sat on the bench in front of the shack. One was an old man dressed in faded overalls. He had dried manure clotted on his boots. His chin touched his chest as he nodded in sleep. The other was a fat woman in an old cotton dress that looked about two sizes too small for her. Sweat stains darkened her underarms and down her front. Martha looked away.

The train's shrill whistle blasted the air as it came around the bend toward the station. It rolled in, brakes screaming metal on metal. The smoke stack shot out black cindery smoke. The cinders fell in a small shower around the train. There it sat, black and ominous--the train of death. Martha could only stare at it in fear. One of the men on the train jumped down and came over to them.

"I'll give you a hand with the...so sorry, really," he stumbled.

Bill followed him to the last car of the train. The fat woman jabbed the old man in the ribs. He raised his head with a start. The woman put her hand up to her mouth. She turned and glanced sideways at Martha and her mother, pointing.

"It was an accident. He didn't know," Mrs. Larson said in quiet hitching sobs.

Martha didn't know what to do for her. She felt so helpless. She patted her mother's hand and glared at the woman through blurry eyes.

Bill and the man loaded a plain pine box onto the truck bed. It looked so new. The strident whistle of the train pierced through Martha's brain as it pulled out She hated that sound.

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--Donna Lois Carter, editor